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ABSTRACT

This paper recounts the history of jazz music in the United States and its passage from despised, marginal entertainment to the solid respect conferred by academe. The author asserts that such respect has little to do with music and a great deal to do with class, race, jobs, and money. The first extracurricular college jazz band at North Texas State College in 1947 has since moved to tenured chairs in music departments. The author and other researchers caution that the very vibrancy of jazz may be swaddled inside the velvet cage of academic music which may threaten its very existence. (EH)

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ALICE G. MARQUIS

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Jazz Goes to College:
Has Academic Status Served the Art?

by Alice Goldfarb Marquis

The long, arduous passage of jazz from a despised, marginal entertainment to the solid respect conferred by academe has relatively little to do with the music, and a great deal to do with class, race, jobs, and -- that potent persuader -- money. But, while jazz today is part of music programs in hundreds of colleges and universities, this unique American contribution to world music has by no means conquered the hearts and minds of America's music faculties. The research environment of academe has not re-invigorated the jazz canon, nor have university-trained musicians been able to enhance their music's magnetism for mass audiences or eager record buyers.[1]

Typical of jazz's back-door approach to the campus was the first college jazz band, established in 1947 by a graduate student, M.E. (Gene) Hall, at North Texas State College. His One O'Clock Lab Band's success in putting what was then a small, provincial college on the musical map persuaded the music department to offer a few courses in jazz history and performance, leading to North Texas State's leap, in 1956, to become the only college in the world offering a major in jazz. Not that the college dared to use the word "jazz." As late as

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[1]This paper benefitted enormously from the knowledge and advice provided by the San Diego Independent Scholars' works-in-progress group and by pianist-composer David Burge.

1969, when alumni had joined stellar jazz ensembles and were teaching at major universities, the program was still listed in the college's catalog as "Dance Band."[2]

Even this innocuous label was anathema to music departments at more distinguished universities. Surveying his colleagues throughout the mid-west during the 1990s, the ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl found them "determinedly uni-musical," devoting themselves with single-minded passion to "study and propagation of the Central classical music." While colleagues in visual art were offering courses in Oriental or African art, music departments shunned all but classical sounds, even discouraging students from contact with dance bands or popular music in their spare time. "This was not an institution," Nettl concluded, "in which musical cultures met." Indeed, music departments strained to suppress all but the Chosen Music: singing teachers warned students that jazz might harm their voices, and professors accused those listening to the likes of Elvis Presley of "polluting themselves." As the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu observes in his path-breaking study, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*: "It is no accident that, when they have to be justified ... [tastes] ... are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes."[3]

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[2]Allen Scott, ***Jazz Educated Man: A Sound Foundation*** (Washington DC: American International, 1973), pp. 18-21; _____, "The *Down Beat* Achievement Awards for Jazz Education," ***Down Beat***, June 1992, p. 34. North Texas State has since developed one of the largest music departments in the western world.

[3]Bruno Nettl, "A Place for All Musics? The Concentric Circles of the Music Building," in Tamara E. Livingston, Melinda Russell, Larry F. War, and Bruno Nettl, eds., *Community of Music: An Ethnographic Seminar in Champaign-Urbana* (Champaign IL: Elephant & Cat, 1993), p. 95; Bruno Nettl, *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music* (Urbana IL: University of Illinois, 1995), pp. 82-3; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 56-7.

Nevertheless, a murmur of advocacy for jazz studies was heard, for the first time, during the 1950s. Marshall Stearns, a Hunter College medieval literature professor who founded the Institute for Jazz Studies, grandly foresaw courses in "The World Origins of American Popular Music" offered at colleges and "visiting lectureships and endowed chairs in American music ... established at our leading universities."[4] When the State Department enlisted jazz stars in its cultural offensive and sent them touring abroad to wild acclaim, it appeared that their music was now accepted by authorities. But the scholarly world showed only a smattering of interest. Boston University announced that jazz would be included in its summer conference of music educators, and the *Dictionary of American Biography* began to include jazz musicians.[5] The *Music Index* for periodical literature took note of jazz under "Colleges and Universities" for the first time in its 1958 cumulation.

During the cultural revolution of the 1960s, university music departments appeared to be blinking like startled deer in the spotlight of public scrutiny. The University of Miami expanded a scattering of jazz courses into a full program offering a B.A. and M.A; the dean was the first musician with a jazz background.[6] Stanford University offered a nine-month series of lectures, concerts, films, and exhibitions featuring a galaxy of jazz stars. But the

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[4]Marshall, Stearns, "What Price Jazz?" *National Music Council Bulletin*, May 1955, p. 1 (Archives of the Institute for Jazz Studies, Rutgers University, Newark NJ).

[5]James Lincoln Collier, *Jazz: The American Theme Song* (New York: Oxford University, 1993), pp. 141-42.

[6]_____, "Achievement Awards for Jazz Education," *Down Beat*, May 1994, p. 45.

Stanford music department remained inviolate, no jazz courses.[7] Nevada Southern University sponsored a two-week, two-credit course in jazz arranging. It featured such stars as Henry Mancini, and each week cost $110 and offered one credit.[8] Jazz writer Rudi Blesh was appointed professor of American Arts at NYU, and Ithaca College sponsored a workshop for students "sincerely interested in jazz."[9] Many colleges offered sporadic jazz courses or programs, but prestigious institutions remained untouched. Harvard's most famous music alumnus, Leonard Bernstein, may have written his senior honors thesis on "The Absorption of Race Elements into American Music," but his alma mater resolutely barred studies of such race elements. In 1967, Harvard began to offer a PhD in composition and music theory ... classical music theory, that is.[10]

But beneath the calm surface, prophetic ripples perturbed the academic musical world. As Second World War veterans on the GI Bill began swamping campuses, colleges discovered music's charms as student entertainment and also as a rich source of cash for student organizations. By 1964, *Billboard* was running a 126-page supplement aimed at the college music market; it was stuffed with advertising for record labels, musical instruments,

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[7] _____, "Stanford University Plans Jazz Lecture-Concert Series," *Down Beat*, July 15, 1965, p. 10.

[8] _____, "Jazz Arranging Clinic at Nevada Southern U.," *Down Beat*, Jan. 23, 1969, p. 12.

[9] George Hoefer, "First Annual Eastern Jazz Conference," *Down Beat*, Nov. 30, 1967, p. 21; George Wiskirchen, "Jazz on Campus," *Down Beat*, May 20, 1965, p. 36.

[10] Howard Pollack, *Harvard Composers: Walter Piston and His Students, from Elliott Carter to Frederic Rzewski* (Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow, 1992), p. 108; Elliott Forbes, *A History of Music at Harvard* (Cambridge MA: Harvard, 1988), pp. 153-54.

talent agencies and performers. ASCAP[11] cancelled its exemption for educational institutions and began charging colleges for performances of its composers' works. A *Billboard* poll showed that Dave Brubeck, Miles Davis, Cerry Mulligan, Benny Goodman, Stan Getz, Oscar Peterson, Stan Kenton, Duke Ellington, and the Modern Jazz Quartet were among students' favorite performers.[12] By 1966, colleges had become the most lucrative music venue in the U.S., with jazz groups earning as much as $30,000 per appearance.[13]

Jazz, however, was not the only musical success on campus. Folk singers drew enthusiastic fans, as did Tony Bennett, Frank Sinatra, and the much-maligned Elvis Presley. But these performers did not have behind them the civil rights movement's pressure for recognition of blacks' contributions, especially jazz, to American music. Supplanted in the wider culture by rhythm and blues, country, and especially rock music; facing dwindling live performance opportunities in nightclubs and bars; squeezed by a proliferation of trained musicians; and self-exiled by increasingly abstruse performance styles, jazz musicians sought the same refuge that so many marginal classical composers and performers had found -- college music departments.

The 1970s saw the flowering of jazz in campus music buildings across the country. Paul Tanner attracted as many as 700 students to his classes on jazz development at UCLA;

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[11]American Society for Composers, Authors, and Publishers, an organization devoted to collecting and distributing royalties for its members.

[12]College Music Supplement to *Billboard*, Mar. 28, 1964, p. 88; Gene Bruck, "ASCAP Goes to School in Move to Support Serious Composers," *Variety*, Mar. 25, 1964, p. 54.

[13]Herm Schoenfeld, "Hottest B.O. Scene on Campus," *Variety*, Mar. 16, 1966, pp. 55, 58.

after a survey, in 1970, of 600 colleges, he reported that most of them wanted to add more jazz courses, but had trouble finding faculty with the necessary advanced degrees.[14] The University of Indiana, home of a renowned music school, hired a respected black bibliographer and musicologist, Dominique-Rene de Lerma, to head a new Black Music Center.[15] To recruit more music students, colleges began giving course credit for participation in jazz bands.[16] A signal victory for jazz had come in 1969, when the venerable New England Conservatory of Music began to offer a degree in jazz as part of its Afro-American music department; by 1973, 75 applicants were vying for 10 freshman places.[17] At the conservative University of Utah, the jazz program underwent an abrupt reversal of fortune, illustrating the ruckus jazz often raised in academe. Begun in 1967, the University of Utah jazz program enrolled some 101 students, almost 30% of all music majors, five years later. Then the music faculty voted 7-4 not to renew instructor Ladd McIntosh's contract for the following year, curtailed Jazz Studies director William Fowler (who was tenured), and placed authority for counseling jazz students with the department chair. Students protested loudly enough to bring *Down Beat* publisher Church Suber to Salt Lake City for 2 1/2 days of interviews. "The majority of the faculty think they have won a victory," he wrote. But their triumph was brief. The entire University of Utah jazz faculty moved to nearby Westminster College, taking along

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[14]Paul Tanner, "Jazz in Higher Education," *Music Journal*, Oct. 1970, pp. 22, 69-9.

[15]_____, "Jazz on Campus," *Down Beat*, Sept. 17, 1970, p. 38.

[16]Paul Tanner, "Jazz Goes to College -- II," *Music Educators Journal*, Apr. 1971, p. 49.

[17]Carl Atkins, "Afro-American Music Mixes," *Music Journal*, May 1974, p. 43.

most of their students.[18]

While few music departments acted as vindictively as Utah's, lively, often bitter, debate accompanied the arrival of jazz in academe. Indiana University may have a Black Music Center, but, said professor David N. Baker, the school's message to the black student remained: "Of course, it is our music you will study because your music is not really that important: you know, spirituals and jazz and things like that."[19] Many departments still believed that students interested in jazz should leave their preference at the portals engraved with the revered names: Beethoven, Verdi, Wagner. They agreed with music educator Wayne Scott, who suggested that the jazz musician who wants to earn a college degree "should put his jazz aside" lest his "jazz compulsion ... deprive him of his best efforts in legitimate studies."[20]

Nor was the black community totally supportive of jazz in academe. Events at Howard University, the pre-eminent black institution of higher learning in America, illustrate the challenge of jazz to the middle-class black community. Until the early 1970s the Howard music curriculum consisted entirely of the Western European canon. Then a faculty-student subcommittee drawing up criteria for choosing a new dean of the College of Fine Arts set off

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[18]Scott Allen, *Jazz Educated Man: A Sound Foundation* (Washington DC: American International, 1973), pp. 58-9, 63-64, 66-7; Dan Morgenstern, "Jazz on Campus," *Down Beat*, Oct. 12, 1972, p. 44.

[19]David N. Baker, Jr. in Dominique-René de Lerma, ed., *Black Music in Our Culture: Curricular Ideas on the Subjects, Materials, and Problems* (Kent OH: Kent State University, 1970), p. 29.

[20]Wayne Scott, "Jazz Goes to College," *Music Journal*, Sept. 1962, p. 100.

a furor by proposing that music education "should be centered around the black experience."[21] Howard responded quickly. By 1976, the university's Jazz Ensemble was touring Eastern Europe and began recording an annual album. In 1979, Howard hired Billy Eckstine band alumnus John Malachi, who unveiled the Howard University Jazz Repertory Orchestra three years later. In 1983, the Jazz Ensemble toured the Caribbean and Central America, sponsored by the U.S. Information Agency, and Howard's jazz program began offering an M.A. degree.[22]

By the 1990s jazz was a presence in hundreds of academic music departments. But a cloud of uneasy speculations and observations continue to swirl around this reality. As early as 1963, the musicologist George Wiskirchen had urged college jazz programs to "avoid an academistic or ivory-tower approach." Since most music jobs are in the popular or jazz fields, he wrote, "they must take themselves out of the all-engrossing ethereal utopia that is too often bred in colleges."[23] Similarly, jazz historian Barry Ulanov worried in 1965 about how acceptance of jazz as an art would affect the musician: "In search of approval ... he is likely to ... turn out large-scale works of a high literary and musical tone and very little else."[24] Music sociologist Richard Peterson noted that jazz was relentlessly moving toward the norms

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[21]Ellsworth Janifer, "The Role of Black Studies in Music Education: A Critical Analysis," in Jim Haskins, ed., *Black Manifesto for Education* (New York: Morrow, 1973), p. 153.

[22]Richard Harrington, "Howard's New Look at Old Jazz," *Washington Post*, Sept. 28, 1982; Richard Harrington, "Jazz on the Road," *Washington Post*, Sept. 13, 1983.

[23]George Wiskirchen, "Jazz Education at the College Level," *Down Beat*, Sept. 26, 1963, p. 17.

[24]Barry Ulanov, *Two Worlds of American Art: The Private and the Popular* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 55-6.

of classical music. "It takes place in concert halls, academic workshops, and recording studios," he wrote in 1972. "The audience is expected to make an intellectual response rather than to be physically involved in the music ... Rather than depending on a mass market for financial support, there is increasing dependence on patronage from universities, the government, and foundations."[25]

Indeed, in 1970 the National Endowment for the Arts began a tentative program to support jazz: some $22,000 distributed among 30 individuals and organizations.[26] Civil rights organizations and college music departments eager to fund their new jazz programs prodded the NEA until grants swelled to more than $1 million in the next twenty years, a 54-fold increase. By 1990, there were 71 jazz fellowships totalling $450,000 and 54 institutional grants totalling more than $750,000.[27]

Jazz had "arrived." But where? And to what end? In the academic setting, jazz mimicked all the arts in developing an official history and an official canon, perhaps even an official music. It was a path against which many observers had warned. In 1970, when all sorts of creative types were heading into academe, the cultural critic Eric Larrabee described the artist's anomalous predicament on campus as "at once an oddity, a tame pet, a demonstration model." Artists, he wrote, "were allowed to mingle with the established

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[25]Richard A. Peterson, "The Phases of Jazz," in Charles Nanry, ed., *American Music: From Storyville to Woodstock* (New Brunswick NJ: Transaction, 1972), p. 146.

[26]_____, "Nat'l Endowment of Arts Recognizes Jazz at Last; Grants 20G for Projects," *Variety*, Dec. 23, 1970, p. 44.

[27]James Lincoln Collier, *Jazz: The American Theme Song*, pp. 144-45. NEA funding for jazz still lags far behind total grants given to opera and concert music.

disciplines only after they had made themselves over into reasonable facsimiles of scholarship."[28] Willingness to play this role has benefitted the many jazz artists who have found a steady livelihood as professors of music, and has also conferred much-deserved respect upon a music so viciously denounced in the past.

The price of respectability, however, has been steep. Joining the avant-garde of classical music in disdain for the wide audience, contemporary jazz sits in its tenured chairs, historicising, theorizing, plodding through the disorderly debris inevitably left behind by a dynamically developing popular art. It develops its curricula, sifts its archives, trains repertory ensembles, manages competitions, and -- the ultimate mystery -- debates on how to teach "improvisation." But the public has moved on; sales of jazz recordings account for about the same paltry share of the market as classical music -- less than 4 percent. In the official jazz history of the textbooks, what was once the most vital, expressive part of American culture has become another classical music, the geniuses of its past -- Beiderbecke, Armstrong, Parker, Miles Davis -- now just a roll-call of unassailable icons scarcely to be scrutinized afresh by new generations.

In his penetrating study of jazz, the historian Eric Hobsbawm worried that jazz's "yearning for official recognition" mortally threatens its authenticity. The desire for respect, he wrote, diluted much of the music, luring "musicians of all styles time and again to insist

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[28]Eric Larrabee, "Artist and University," in Margaret Mahoney, ed., *The Arts on Campus: The Necessity for Change* (Greenwich CT: New York Graphic Society, 1970), pp. 41, 43.

on playing with string sections (for violins symbolize accepted cultural status in music)."[29] The former editor of *Down Beat*, Gene Lees, echoed these misgivings "The gravest danger facing jazz," he wrote, "may lie in ... comfortable acclimation to the academic world ... it will leach the individuality out of the art." Pointing to such new musics as rock and rap, he feared that jazz would be "largely abandoned by the ethnic group that invented it."[30]

For students, the widespread promise of a degree -- or even an advanced degree -- in jazz studies collapses into disappointment and frustration to the same extent as for the classical musician. A career in music does not materialize for more than 10 percent of graduates of even such an exalted institution as Juilliard. A single-minded prodigy like Wynton Marsalis may win Grammies in both jazz and classical music, may manage a distinguished jazz program at Lincoln Center, may attract thousands to concerts, and market successful recordings. But the chance of reaping such rewards will elude all but a handful of the thousands of shiny-faced graduates poured out into a Darwinian struggle by the mindlessly grinding mills of American higher education.[31]

Yes, jazz deserves all the respect, scholarship, and training that its presence in academe suggests. It deserves to be taken seriously. But, unlike the classical music created for society's stratosphere (elite), jazz erupted from the lowest levels of society, to capture the

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[29]Eric Hobsbawm, *The Jazz Scene* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), pp. 243-44.

[30]Gene Lees, *Meet Me at Jim & Andy's* (New York: Oxford University, 1988), pp. 26-7.

[31]For an incisive analysis of how reckless overproduction of musicians came about, see David Burge, "College Music Programs: Progress Without Purpose," *The Instrumentalist*, Mar. 1989, pp. 23-29.

hearts and bodies of exuberant masses. Despised and persecuted, jazz won a place for itself at the center of American culture. It survived the unrestrained abuse of America's musical establishment. It gave its name to an era. It survived America's worst depression in the arms of swing. It captured the world with its blue notes and fascinating rhythm. Now, swaddled inside the velvet cage of academic music, can real jazz survive?

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